

PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE
from the
AMERICAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION
IN MOSCOW

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

22 West 54th Street, New York, N. Y.

October 28 - November 15, 1959

INTRODUCTION

The American National Exhibition in Moscow, which included the present art exhibition, was the most ambitious project so far to implement the East-West cultural exchange agreement signed by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1958. This agreement between the two most powerful nations on earth, and the two deadliest potential enemies, was a tremendous step toward that understanding among peoples on which, perhaps more than on governmental manoeuvrings, depends the hope for continuing existence of the human race on this planet.

The American Exhibition and its counterpart, the simultaneous Soviet exposition in New York, were designed to present the full panorama of contemporary life in each country. Our show was the work of several governmental departments in cooperation with private enterprise, coordinated by the Director of the United States Information Agency, George V. Allen. For the art exhibition a four-man committee of selection was nominated by two official standing committees, the Advisory Committee on the Arts of the Department of State, and the Advisory Committee on Cultural Information of the USIA. The committee of selection consisted of Franklin C. Watkins, painter, as Chairman; Lloyd Goodrich, Director of the Whitney Museum of American Art; Henry R. Hope, Chairman of the Fine Arts Department of Indiana University; and Theodore Roszak, sculptor. Our appointment with the approval of the President was announced by the White House in February, 1959. Meetings were held at the Whitney Museum, whose staff and records were available to the committee.

At the first meeting our committee was informed that we were to be responsible for the plan of the show, and that our decisions were to be final and not subject to change for non-artistic reasons. As to the period to be covered, we soon agreed that since both the American and Soviet expositions were to concentrate on the contemporary scene, we would not go back to the 19th century. On the other hand we felt that a show com-

posed entirely of our present-day art would be bewildering to the Russian public, which has had little contact with contemporary art outside the Communist world. To bridge this gap we settled on the last thirty years, since 1928. Then came the question of whether to select many artists, or only a limited number represented by several examples each. In view of the number and variety of gifted individuals in this period, we decided to include as many as space allowed, representing each with a single example, except for sculptors whose works lent themselves to being shown outdoors in Sokolniki Park as well as in the art gallery.

Because of strict space limitations it was impossible to include all the leading figures of the period, or to represent certain of them by their largest works. Nevertheless the committee believes that the show covers the chief trends and viewpoints of these thirty years, from the early New York realists and painters of the American scene, and the American pioneers of modern art, through today's abstract expressionist school. Stylistically it ranges from the realism of Hopper and Wyeth to the pure abstraction of Pollock and Rothko. The committee feels justified in saying that this is the broadest, most balanced representation of recent American painting and sculpture so far shown abroad by our government.

The complex task of securing loans and assembling and shipping the works was taken care of by the USIA, whose staff members, especially Lois Bingham and Robert Sivard, carried it out with devotion, intelligence and hard work far beyond the call of duty. Owners, public and private, were extraordinarily generous, often giving up capital works not usually lent for exhibition abroad; so that most of the committee's first choices were made available - a remarkable record. Through superhuman efforts by several individuals and organizations - Lois Bingham, Lawrence A. Fleischman, Edith Halpert, the Archives of American Art housed in the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Meriden Gravure Company - a completely illustrated catalogue with Russian text was produced in time for the opening.

In view of the chequered history of past governmental art exhibitions, all concerned were prepared for repercussions from

the extreme right of the art world and of Congress. Over the last twelve years four important shows of American art had been cancelled because of reactionary attacks, based almost entirely on the alleged political backgrounds of some of the artists, mostly dating back to the 1930's. These attacks had been instigated or abetted by a small minority of ultra-conservative artists, mostly sculptors who have had a virtual monopoly of governmental art commissions, and hence have a vested interest in preventing any broadening of official art policies.

On June 3rd Representative Francis E. Walter, Chairman of the Committee on Un-American Activities, charged in the House that "of the 67 artists chosen for exhibition in Moscow, 34 - a fraction more than 50 percent - have records of affiliation with Communist fronts and causes. Of these 34 there are 12 whose records appear to be relatively inconsequential.... This leaves 22, or one-third of the 67 artists, with significant records.... It is repulsive to me that a U.S. Government agency should glorify so-called artists who stand for nothing that this country represents." Subsequently Walter wrote Secretary of State Herter asking that the works of the 22 be eliminated.

Under these attacks, Mr. Allen and the USIA stood firm against any censorship of the show. President Eisenhower, when asked at a news conference what he intended to do about the matter, said that while Walter's particular target, Jack Levine's Welcome Home, "looks more like a lampoon than art, ... I am not going to be the censor myself for the art." This wise decision drew widespread support from leading organizations and individuals in the art world.

These events touched off a public controversy seldom equalled on matters of art. Editorials and cartoons appeared in papers from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The more gullible sections of the press swallowed Walter's statements hook, line and sinker: headlines shouted "Communist Slanted U.S. Exhibit," "Pink Painters at Moscow," "Is This U.S. Art?" But a considerable proportion of the press, especially leading papers in the larger cities, supported the President's stand, upheld the

method of selection, pointed out the consequences of censorship, especially on the heels of the Pasternak case, and displayed common sense and a healthy tendency to make fun of the opposition. In Congress, liberals of both parties spoke in defense of artistic freedom, notably Senators Javits and Hart. Representative Thompson and Senator Humphrey issued a joint statement in which they said: "If we are going to have a cultural exchange program with the USSR and other countries, then let us conduct it in an orderly, logical and mature fashion; in a way that will gain the nation the respect of artists and intellectuals throughout the world, rather than subject us to ridicule."

In the end, no works were withdrawn, although at the President's request a group of 18th and 19th-century paintings were added, in another section of the building. The Administration's decision to stand firm marked a great and encouraging difference from similar past incidents. Nevertheless, as long as such reactionary pressures continue, the cultural exchange program will be endangered. It would seem that the time has come for a clarification of governmental policy. The basic issue is simple: an artist's political and social opinions or affiliations are personal matters, distinct from his work, which must be judged on its merits. The government is not exhibiting artists, but their works. If such a commonsense policy should be clearly defined and firmly adhered to, the reactionary attacks would lose their point. Otherwise, the future of governmental activities involving American art seems dubious indeed.

The American National Exhibition opened in Moscow on July 25th and continued for six weeks. The art exhibition, which had received so negative an official send-off (it was by-passed by Vice-President Nixon in his historic tour of the exposition with Khrushchev) proved in the opinion of many qualified reporters to be one of the chief features, along with the Circarama, the color TV studio, the Family of Man, the book exhibit, the fashion show, and the automobiles. Edith Gregor Halpert, Director of the Downtown Gallery in New York, had been appointed Curator of the exhibition, and to her fell the arduous task of installing it, in record time and with insufficient help, and of meeting the first onslaught of the tremendous crowds,

up to 10,000 to 20,000 a day. After the first few hectic days it was necessary to admit the public in shifts, and to put up stout guard-rails. It proved impossible to give public gallery talks as planned, but Mrs. Halpert with her knowledge of Russian was able to answer the innumerable questions, and to write descriptive labels. After her departure her place was taken by Richard B. K. McLanathan, Director of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, who expanded the explanatory features by producing tape recordings to be played in the galleries and the outdoor sculpture show, and by other educational activities.

All of us who had to do with planning the show had foreseen what would be the reaction of a public which had been cut off for two generations from the main currents of Western art. As expected, incomprehension, bewilderment and a certain degree of hostility were the most common reactions. But what we had not foreseen was the amount of simple curiosity, of sincere desire for explanation, of human friendliness. Since the distribution of tickets was officially controlled, these positive responses were all the more encouraging. The general public reception was not very different from that of an American mass audience to modern art, except for some obviously party-line questions and comments. The visitors' book records over and over such remarks as: "The exhibition is testimony of the spiritual degradation of the so-called free world." "The work of madmen." "Brilliant nonsense." And by contrast, continual praise of the "socialist realism" of Soviet art. One visitor writes that the Pollock and the Gorky "were obviously painted by madmen," adding naively, "Don't be offended by this." But every now and then appears a note of open-mindedness, of thanks for the opportunity to see something new, even of enjoyment. Such favorable comments are signed either illegibly or by visitors from the satellite nations.

The most popular painting was Andrew Wyeth's Children's Doctor. Peter Blume's Eternal City attracted by its technique but puzzled by its complex symbolism. Levine's Welcome Home was admired, and the fact that it was included in spite of official attacks was a telling demonstration of American

freedom of expression. The abstract works naturally produced the most violent reactions, but even the Pollock seemed to exert a strong fascination; it was frequently referred to. The advanced metal sculpture proved the hardest for the Russians to take.

After a time Mrs. Halpert wisely decided to close the galleries to the public from one to three every day, and to admit only professionals – artists, students, architects, designers, critics – and to give them gallery talks, followed by informal discussions. From these sessions, which were continued by Mr. McLanathan, emerged some of the most unexpected and rewarding responses. Among professionals there proved to be a surprising amount of interest, understanding and even knowledge of contemporary American art, acquired not from originals but from reproductions. American books and magazines, scarce in the USSR, had often been photographed by those who had access to them, for distribution to their colleagues. In these contacts with artists and other professionals, in the opinion of both Mrs. Halpert and Mr. McLanathan, the most valuable results of the show were achieved.

The press, needless to say, was uniformly hostile. One newspaperman who had been verbally enthusiastic, when asked if he would say the same things in print, replied: "Nyet! I do not want to lose my excellent job." The most complete critique was that of the high priest of socialist realism, Vladimir Kemenov, in Sovietskaya Kultura. It reads much like the diatribes against modern art from arch-conservatives in our own country, except that the philosophic basis is the blighting moralism of socialist realism – Tolstoi's What Is Art? revived, with even less comprehension of what art is. After grudging recognition of the realistic works (Kemenov bewails the absence, among others, of Rockwell Kent, Frederick Waugh, Sidney Dickinson and Dale Nichols) he proceeds to flay surrealism as the art of decay, and abstraction as a symptom of the decline of the capitalist world. "The profoundly reactionary quintessence of abstraction and its corrupt influence lie in the fact that it separates the artist from the spectator or from the nation, that it destroys the simple elements of literal reality in art which make the work intelligible

and understandable." Throughout Kemenov pays his respects in no uncertain terms to the present writer as author of the catalogue introduction; it seems that I am no better than an apologist for the corruption of capitalist modern art.

But in spite of this predicted official reception, the final impression left on those who were present was the unexpected response, especially from artists and other professionals. Such a response from creators and intellectuals can be of incalculable value for the future. It is to be hoped that the 1959 exhibition will be only the first of a series which will present to the Russian public, critics, and artists a true picture of our democratic culture.

From the early planning stages, the Whitney Museum believed that the American public should have an opportunity to see the exhibition after its return. The subsequent controversy only served to strengthen this belief. We are happy that the United States Information Agency was willing to have us arrange directly with the lenders for extension of their loans -- which every one of them, without exception, generously did. The only omissions are six paintings previously committed to another USIA exhibition in Europe, and the sculpture which was shown outdoors in Sokolniki Park.

In closing we wish to pay tribute to the staff of the USIA who made this historic exhibition possible: George V. Allen, Director; Abbott Washburn, Deputy Director; Robert Sivard, Chief of the Exhibits Division; and Lois Bingham, Chief of the Fine Arts Section of the Exhibits Division.

LLOYD GOODRICH

Director, Whitney Museum of American Art

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

Paintings

The medium is oil unless otherwise stated.

- Ivan Le Lorraine Albright. The Hole in the Wall Gang. 1952. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman.
- William Baziotes. Moby Dick. 1955. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. William A. M. Burden.
- Thomas Hart Benton. Boom Town. 1928. Lent by the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery.
- Hyman Bloom. Younger Jew with Torah. 1942-44. Lent by the Smith College Museum of Art.
- Peter Blume. The Eternal City. 1937. Lent by the Museum of Modern Art.
- Alexander Brook. My Son Sandy. 1932. Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Charles Burchfield. Promenade. 1928. Watercolor. Lent by A. Conger Goodyear.
- John Steuart Curry. Wisconsin Landscape. 1938-39. Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Stuart Davis. Combination Concrete, Number 2. 1958. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Earl Wade Hubbard.
- Charles Demuth. "After All..." 1953. Lent by the Norton Gallery and School of Art.
- Edwin Dickinson. Ruin at Daphne. 1943-53. Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Philip Evergood. Street Corner. 1936. Lent by Himan Brown.
- Lyonel Feininger. Manhattan, The Tower. 1944. Lent by Mrs. Drew Chidester.
- William Glackens. Soda Fountain. 1935. Lent by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.
- Fritz Glarner. Relational Painting. 1949-51. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

- Arshile Gorky. Water of the Flowery Mill. 1944. Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- George Grosz. Peace, II. 1946. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.
- Philip Guston. Passage. 1957. Lent by Mrs. Phyllis B. Lambert.
- Marsden Hartley. Mt. Katahdin, Autumn, No. 1. 1942. Lent by the University of Nebraska Art Galleries.
- Edward Hopper. Lighthouse at Two Lights. 1929. Lent by Richard D. Tucker.
- Karl Knaths. Winter Wharf. 1955. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.
- Walt Kuhn. White Clown. 1929. Lent by the Honorable and Mrs. W. Averell Harriman.
- Yasuo Kuniyoshi. The Amazing Juggler. 1952. Lent by the Des Moines Art Center.
- Jacob Lawrence. Fulton & Nostrand. 1958. Tempera. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Rittmaster.
- Jack Levine. Welcome Home. 1946. Lent by the Brooklyn Museum.
- Conrad Marca-Relli. Pamplona. 1958. Collage and oil. Lent by the Kootz Gallery.
- John Marin. Movement - Sea and Sky. 1946. Lent by the William H. Lane Foundation.
- Reginald Marsh. Steeplechase Park. 1936. Egg tempera. Lent by Joseph H. Hirshhorn.
- Robert Motherwell. Wall Painting #4. 1953. Lent by I. Donald Grossman.
- Georgia O'Keeffe. Ram's Head, White Hollyhock and Little Hills. 1936. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Milton Lowenthal.
- Abraham Rattner. Two Figures and Masks, Composition #3. 1949. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Shapiro.

- Ben Shahn. Parable. 1958. Tempera. Lent by the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute.
- Charles Sheeler. Upper Deck. 1929. Lent by the William Hayes Fogg Art Museum.
- Charles Sheeler. Lunenburg. 1954. Lent by the William H. Lane Foundation.
- John Sloan. Sixth Avenue Elevated at Third Street. 1928. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.
- Raphael Soyer. Waiting Room. 1942-43. Lent by the Corcoran Gallery of Art.
- Eugene Speicher. Red Moore, Blacksmith. 1935. Lent by Mrs. Eugene Speicher.
- Niles Spencer. In Fairmont. 1951. Lent by the Museum of Modern Art.
- Joseph Stella. American Landscape. 1929. Lent by the Walker Art Center.
- Yves Tanguy. Multiplication of the Arcs. 1954. Lent by the Museum of Modern Art.
- Mark Tobey. Delta. 1952. Tempera. Lent by Dan R. Johnson.
- Franklin Watkins. Portrait of Thomas Raeburn White. 1940. Lent by Mrs. Thomas R. White.
- Grant Wood. Parson Weems' Fable. 1939. Lent by Mrs. John P. Marquand.

Sculpture

- Saul Baizerman. Extase. 1950-57. Lent by the World House Galleries.
- Alexander Calder. Black Mobile. 1957. Lent by the University of Michigan.
- Jo Davidson. Dr. Albert Einstein. 1934. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

- José de Rivera. Construction No. 47. 1957. Lent by the Grace Borgenicht Gallery.
- John Flannagan. Pelican. 1941. Lent by Joseph H. Hirshhorn.
- Chaim Gross. Balancing. 1935. Lent by the artist.
- Ibram Lassaw. Galactic Cluster #1. 1958. Lent by the Kootz Gallery.
- Robert Laurent. La Toilette. 1944. Lent by the Kraushaar Galleries.
- Seymour Lipton. Sorcerer. 1957. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.
- Elie Nadelman. Head of a Woman. 1922. Lent by the Robert Isaacson Gallery.
- Isamu Noguchi. The Ring. 1957. Lent by the Stable Gallery.
- Theodore Roszak. Hound of Heaven. 1953. Lent by the Pierre Matisse Gallery.